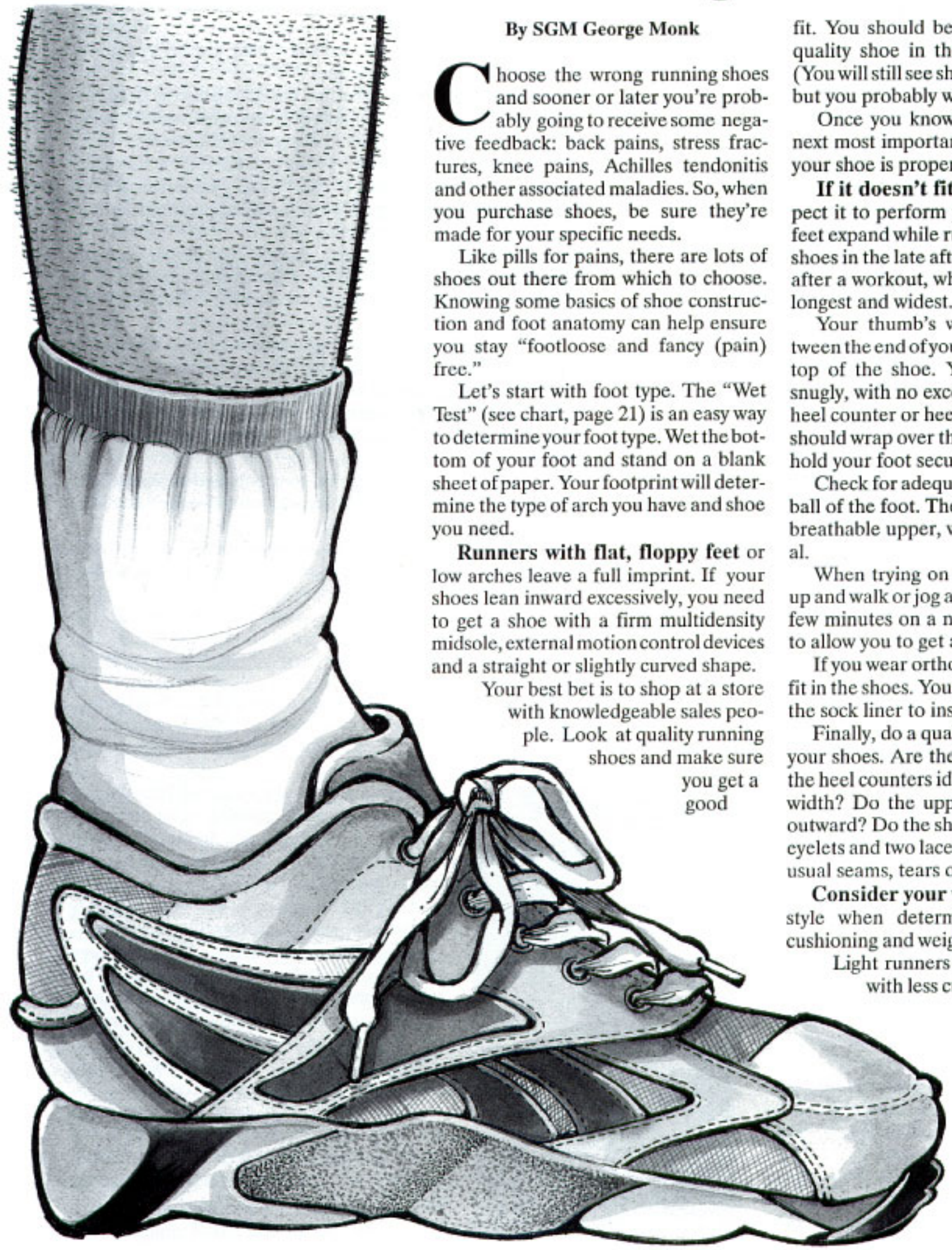
If the running shoe fits...*You're*



By SGM George Monk

Choose the wrong running shoes and sooner or later you're probably going to receive some negative feedback: back pains, stress fractures, knee pains, Achilles tendonitis and other associated maladies. So, when you purchase shoes, be sure they're made for your specific needs.

Like pills for pains, there are lots of shoes out there from which to choose. Knowing some basics of shoe construction and foot anatomy can help ensure you stay "footloose and fancy (pain) free."

Let's start with foot type. The "Wet Test" (see chart, page 21) is an easy way to determine your foot type. Wet the bottom of your foot and stand on a blank sheet of paper. Your footprint will determine the type of arch you have and shoe you need.

Runners with flat, floppy feet or low arches leave a full imprint. If your shoes lean inward excessively, you need to get a shoe with a firm multidensity midsole, external motion control devices and a straight or slightly curved shape.

Your best bet is to shop at a store with knowledgeable sales people. Look at quality running shoes and make sure you get a good fit. You should be able to find a high quality shoe in the $35 to $75 range. (You will still see shoes for $100 or more, but you probably won't need them.)

Once you know your foot type, the next most important aspect in selecting your shoe is proper fit.

If it doesn't fit properly, don't expect it to perform properly. Since your feet expand while running, shop for new shoes in the late afternoon after work or after a workout, when your feet are the longest and widest.

Your thumb's width should fit between the end of your longest toe and the top of the shoe. Your foot should fit snugly, with no excessive motion, in the heel counter or heel cup and the uppers should wrap over the top of the foot and hold your foot securely.

Check for adequate shoe width at the ball of the foot. The shoe should have a breathable upper, whatever the material.

When trying on the shoe, lace them up and walk or jog around the store for a few minutes on a non-carpeted surface to allow you to get an idea of proper fit.

If you wear orthotics, make sure they fit in the shoes. You may have to remove the sock liner to insure proper fit.

Finally, do a quality control check on your shoes. Are they symmetrical? Are the heel counters identical in height and width? Do the uppers slant inward or outward? Do the shoes have a full set of eyelets and two laces? Are there any unusual seams, tears or visible flaws?

Consider your weight and running style when determining the midsole cushioning and weight of shoes you buy.

Light runners can wear light shoes with less cushioning and fewer motion control features.

Footloose & Fancy (Pain)Free

Taller, heavier runners need the best combination of cushioning, stability and rear foot control.

Look for a shoe with a multidensity midsole, a straight to slightly curved shape, a combination-lasted construction and a carbon rubber outsole.

Durability is also an important factor. You can expect 300 to 600 miles out of a quality running shoe, depending on weight, stride mechanics and running surfaced. Pay attention, however, to the midsoles, because you can endanger yourself by trying to get more miles out of your shoe just because the uppers and outsoles are still in good shape.

The weak link in a training shoe is actually the midsole. Although it provides cushioning, the foam that makes up the midsoles break down over time and lose their cushioning. You may not be able to see or feel this loss because your body attempts to adapt to it. A good indicator is the horizontal lines visible along the midsoles.

After about 300 miles of running, you've probably lost about 30 percent of the cushioning ability of the shoe. Running with this loss may cause injury. Keep in mind the midsole—the padded area between the insole and outsole— is the life of the shoe. It protects you from the relentless pounding of running. The midsole is made of a variety of cushioning pads that can improve durability because they replace some of the foam. It will wear out quicker than the outsole.

When you run, your feet pronate (rotate inward when your foot contacts the running surface) and supinate (rotate outward as you "toe off").

This is normal. But if you have either flat feet or extremely high arches you probably either ***over***pronate or ***under***-pronate.

If you overpronate, your shoes will lean inward. If your shoes lean outward, you probably underpronate. Simply enough, you can determine this by carefully examining some of your older running shoes while they're sitting side by side on a flat surface.

If you underpronate (your shoes lean outward) you will require a shoe with a lot of midsole cushioning, slip-lasted construction and a carbon rubber outsole. In addition, flexibility and a straight to slightly curved shape is necessary.

If you have a moderate or normal arch, you can wear a variety of shoes that come in different shapes with a slightly or semicurved shape.

Armed with this information, there's no reason you should suffer unnecessary pains from running in the wrong shoes.

The bottom line? Find a quality shoe made for running that falls within your price range and fits you well. Put them on, lace them up and get "footloose and fancy (pain) free." ■

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The Wet Test

Wet your foot and make a footprint on a flat, dry surface.